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ABSTRACT

Results of the 1985 American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) survey--to determine public attitudes toward media credibility--are reported in this paper. Discussion is categorized according to the 12 issues explored: (1) the believability of media when news reports conflict; (2) geographic scope of topics; (3) reliability of reporting and ability to understand the news; (4) fairness and accuracy; (5) personal experience; (6) opinion and bias; (7) news presentation issues; (8) invasion of privacy and treatment of ordinary people; (9) coverage of specific demographic groups; (10) people in the media; (11) the media as an institution; and (12) people who distrust the media the most. The paper concludes that a majority of the population has low confidence in the media in a number of areas and that the size of the group holding the media in low esteem varies with the credibility issue. It also points out that future research should focus on how to analyze the concerns of highly critical audiences and successfully reduce the size of the credibility problem. Survey instruments reporting the results are appended. (DF)

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THE MEDIA CREDIBILITY PROBLEM:

PUTTING THE RESEARCH INTO PERSPECTIVE

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THE MEDIA CREDIBILITY PROBLEM: PUTTING THE RESEARCH INTO PERSPECTIVE

A long-standing and growing body of research shows that the public views the news media with distrust and that this distrust could be increasing.

Concern about potentially increasing public animosity toward the press led the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) to sponsor the most comprehensive look at the credibility problem to date, with a special focus on newspapers.

The 1985 ASNE media credibility study, which included a qualitative, focus group phase in addition to the national survey (see acknowledgments and appendix for further description), adds to the picture of the problem gained from previous research, helps to place new and old findings into a comprehensive framework to allow fuller understanding of the problem, and highlights areas in which new and old results are in conflict.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some key results in which new dimensions were added, in which previous research was substantiated, and in which results conflicted. The purpose also is to supplement the ASNE reports (MORI Research, 1985b,c) by placing new and old findings on the credibility issue into a broader context. Some suggestions for future research also will be made. Only some portions of the new findings have been selected for discussion here. Other papers and articles integrating new and old findings are in preparation.[1]

First, the ASNE study contributes a number of new insights into the credibility problem. One is that a substantial cause of media distrust is the distance that people feel stands between them and the media, especially coverage of ordinary people, invasion of privacy, and news judgment differences. Another is that the study relates awareness of conflicting media reports to credibility problems. A third is that many people lump all

the media together in their minds and are especially likely to tar newspapers and television with the same brush. However, some credibility problems pertain primarily to newspapers and others relate specifically to television. A fourth new insight is that many people are confused by newspaper policies about separation of facts and opinions. A fifth is that many people hold television personnel, particularly news anchors, in higher esteem than newspaper personnel. The new research also contributes to a broader picture of segments among the public which are especially critical of newspapers and television.

Second, the new ASNE study substantially corroborates previous research in a number of areas, adding a broader perspective on such issues as media believability when news reports are in conflict, impact of local topics versus national ones, areas in which people are especially likely to perceive bias, and variations in credibility measurement.

Third, some of the new findings are in conflict with previous research in measurement of "fairness" and "accuracy." The magnitude of credibility problems in these areas is difficult to assess because people's responses on these topics are especially sensitive to question wording. In an effort to define problems of fairness and accuracy more fully, the ASNE study explored several specific areas, including completeness of newspaper and TV news coverage, perceptions of whether or not media try to correct mistakes, and coverage of controversial topics.

The ASNE study showed that as many as three-fourths of all American adults have some problem with the credibility of the media, and that there appears to be a core group, about one-fifth of all adults, for whom credibility is a severe problem. The size of the population segment which has low confidence in media depends on which aspect of the problem is considered. Twelve aspects of the problem will be discussed here:

1. Believability of media when news reports conflict.
2. Geographic scope of topics.
3. Reliability of reporting and ability to understand the news.
4. Fairness and accuracy.
5. Personal experience.
6. Opinion and bias.
7. News presentation issues.
8. Invasion of privacy and treatment of ordinary people.
9. Coverage of specific demographic groups.
10. People in the media.
11. The media as an institution.
12. People who distrust media the most.

ISSUE 1: BELIEVABILITY OF MEDIA WHEN NEWS REPORTS CONFLICT

The most frequent definition of "credibility" is a question asked periodically since 1959 by the Roper polling organization for the Television Information Office: "If you got conflicting or different reports of the same news story from radio, television, the magazines and the newspapers, which of the four versions would you be most inclined to believe--the one on radio or television or magazines or newspapers?" (Roper, 1983). The 1985 ASNE survey obtained results substantiating Roper's (Table 1). The ASNE study also showed the extent to which people are aware of contradictory news accounts, and it showed that perceptions of media credibility are related to this awareness.

In 1959, Roper found that newspapers held a slight lead over television, but by 1961, television had outdistanced newspapers on this issue and has continued to widen its lead over other media ever since. However, there has not been much change in the percentage choosing

newspapers since 1961 (about 22% in 1982, compared to 53% for TV (Table 1). TV's lead appears to come more from magazines or radio than from newspapers.

A review of other research using the Roper question shows that the percentage of "newspaper believers" has been similar and fairly stable, regardless of the research setting, year conducted, and modifications of the question. The question has been changed to exclude magazines or both magazines and radio, to add "people," or to specify local media versus state, or national and international media.[2]

Naming a geographic location of news topic can influence results on the question (Ryan, 1973; Gantz, 1981; Meyer, 1974; Greenberg and Roloff, 1975). In some cases, newspapers have been perceived to be more believable than television for coverage of local topics (Lemert, 1970; Stempel, 1973; Greenberg and Roloff), although this has not always been so (Gantz; Stempel; Abel and Wirth, 1977; Greenberg and Roloff).

The Roper question has been criticized because it assumes a situation which may not occur often and because people may not even be aware of news source differences if it does occur (Meyer, 1974). Therefore, ASNE respondents were asked if they had ever gotten conflicting reports. Fifty-one percent said yes. Those who did were asked follow-up questions about the conflicting reports that they remembered. Most of these conflicts involved two or more different media, but some involved one medium. Conflicting reports most frequently concerned assassinations or assassination attempts and public figures, crimes, and disasters. The ASNE study found that awareness of conflicting reports is related to media credibility. MORI Research gave people "credibility scores" for both newspapers and television (1985b,c). People scoring low on newspaper and television credibility were more likely than people scoring high to be aware of conflicting reports.

Half a Century of Comparative Data

Public willingness to believe broadcast more than print has been documented for almost 50 years. A version of the Roper question in 1939 gave radio a small edge over newspapers (Erskine, 1970-71). Other questions of this era pitting radio against newspapers for accurate news showed varying results. In some cases, large percentages chose radio over newspapers, and in other cases results were a draw (Table 1).

ISSUE 2: GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE OF TOPICS

In the ASNE study, results were similar to previous research on geographic scope of topic and credibility perceptions if respondents are forced to choose among media. Whether respondents are allowed only one response or multiple responses tends to make a difference. For example, if people were limited to just one news source for local, state, national, or international news, they tended to pick television. These findings are similar to Roper's for "where people usually get most of their news about what's going on in the world today," which allows multiple responses. (However, asking people about each medium separately first can change distributions somewhat, according to Carter and Greenberg, 1965).

The ASNE survey results are different from those of another survey limiting number of responses. The L.A. Times poll found that when people were asked about where they get most of their information about what's happening "around here" and were allowed only one response, newspapers were named more often than TV (Lewis, 1981). When multiple responses were allowed for "information about what people are doing today and what's going on in the world," newspapers did about as well as TV (corroborated by Newsweek's poll; see Alter, et al, 1984).

Forcing people to choose among media can influence findings within the same study. ASNE survey respondents tended to be somewhat similar in the credibility scores that they gave to newspapers and television, but they tended to pick TV over newspapers when forced to choose between them. The ASNE study also found that, in general, people were about twice as likely to prefer to get their news from broadcast media than from print media.

The 1985 results differed from results obtained by Clark, et al (1984) when they asked about preference for several types of news with a question that emphasized newspapers (daily, weekly, and Sunday). (See Table 2.)

ISSUE 3: RELIABILITY OF REPORTING AND ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE NEWS

Geographic scope of topic also affected results for another pair of questions in the 1985 ASNE study which asked people to choose among media. Results differed for local news, but not national and international news, depending on whether credibility was defined as "reliability of news" or "trusting a medium to help understanding of a complex or controversial topic."

When people were forced to choose between newspapers and TV for reliability of reporting on local and state news, television outranked newspapers by a two to one margin. For national and international news, the margin increased for television and decreased for newspapers. The latter finding is similar to that for an L.A. Times poll question without a geographic referent (Table 3).

In contrast to these findings, when the ASNE survey asked people to rate the overall reliability of the daily newspaper most familiar to them and television news on a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" meant "not at all reliable" and "5" meant "very reliable," in separate questions in different parts of the questionnaire, newspapers and television received very similar ratings for overall reliability (63% and 65%, respectively, for ratings of 4

or 5 on the scale).

Respondents also evaluated the reliability of newspaper and TV news coverage of 17 different topics on the same scale. Respondents tended to perceive the two quite similarly in most topic areas, except that newspapers came out slightly better on local news and TV did slightly better on coverage of natural disasters.

Ability to Understand the News

Newspapers showed greater strength in the ASNE survey when people were asked, "If there is a situation in your local area that is hard to understand or is controversial, which one of your local news media would you trust the most to help you understand it?" Half said newspapers, and slightly more than one-third said television. When the question was repeated for national news, more than half selected TV and less than one-third chose newspapers. The latter result is comparable to a question from a Washington Post poll which asked about "major news media." In that poll, national news magazines were mentioned somewhat more often than newspapers. (See Table 4.)

Understanding the news appears to be an important issue. Well over half the respondents in the L.A. Times poll (Lewis, 1981) and almost half of 1985 ASNE respondents said that the news is too complicated to understand (Table 4).

ISSUE 4: FAIRNESS AND ACCURACY

How questions are worded has considerable influence on results for "accuracy" and "fairness" in a number of surveys, and much work remains to be done on measuring these concepts.

Overall marks for fairness and accuracy were quite comparable for daily newspapers and for television news when measured by five-point semantic differential scales in the ASNE study. Approximately half gave both media

high ratings (4 or 5 on the scale) for each of these two characteristics. Roughly 1 in 10 gave poor ratings (1 or 2 on the scale).

In another study (Lewis, 1981; Shaw, 1981), when respondents were given a list of words that could describe the media and responses were limited to two replies, 35% chose "fair" to describe newspapers and 31% chose it for television. In contrast, only 14% said that "accurate" characterized newspapers and 13% said it fit television. Perceptions of fairness and accuracy diverged less in two other surveys (Clark, et al, 1984; Immerwahr, et al, 1980b).

Newsweek's poll (Alter, et al, 1984) asked whether or not certain characteristics were generally applicable to several different media. Strong majorities (more than 7 or 8 in 10) endorsed those media for being accurate and fair. Another national survey obtained results almost this favorable (Izard, 1984). On the other hand, another national survey found almost 6 in 10 agreeing that not enough fairness in the news is either a very serious or fairly serious problem (Immerwahr, et al, 1980b), and a third national survey found almost 6 in 10 who would legislate accuracy and fairness (ABC News Poll, 1984). Table 5 presents results on fairness and accuracy.

The ASNE survey fleshed out problems of accuracy and fairness somewhat in the areas of completeness of newspaper and TV news coverage, perceptions of whether or not media try to correct mistakes, and coverage of controversy.

About 4 in 10 ASNE respondents said that their daily newspapers and TV news "tell the whole" story (scoring 1 or 2 on a five-point scale). This indicates a widespread perception that media could do better in completeness of coverage.

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On the other hand, they tended to be aware of media attempts to correct mistakes. A large majority of ASNE respondents (71%) agreed that the news media usually try to correct their mistakes, but this finding contrasts with that of an ABC news poll (1984), in which 55% agreed that the networks' news programs make a lot of mistakes that they never bother to correct.

People who were aware of local controversies were quite likely to say that local newspapers were doing a good or excellent job of covering that topic (78% of the 4 in 10 who could name a touchy subject locally). They were a little less likely to say this of television news (66%).

ISSUE 5: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The ASNE study helped to show the amount of personal knowledge people have of news events. Other research has not tended to ask about extent of experience. How ASNE respondents rated reporting of topics they know about personally was similar to much previous research on personal experience with news and perceptions of fairness and accuracy.

Almost three-fourths of ASNE respondents were personally familiar with something that had received newspaper coverage, and more than half had personal experience with something television news had reported. When those with personal experience were asked to score "fairness" and "accuracy" of that coverage on a five-point scale, about 6 in 10 gave high marks to newspapers for each and slightly less than 6 in 10 rated television news highly for each. In other surveys, the range of responses on personal experience and accurate media coverage is from 46% in Newsweek's 1984 poll (Alter, et al) to 70% in the Washington Post's 1981 survey. About 71% surveyed by the L.A. Times rated coverage they personally knew about as fair (Lewis, 1981). (See Table 6.)

ISSUE 6: OPINION AND BIAS

Perceptions of bias are among the greatest concerns people have about the media. A number of ASNE findings were congruent with previous research, both for perceived political bias and perceived slanted media viewpoints in general. The ASNE survey also showed that many people misunderstand media policies about separating facts and opinions, think that reporters try to be objective but interject bias into the news anyway, and have a difficult time coping with bias. Question wording also plays a role in results on media bias.

Political Bias

A majority of those responding to the 1985 ASNE survey thought that the media have political leanings. However, they tended to disagree on direction. Perceptions depended on their own political views. These results were much like those of Whitney (1984) and Lewis (1981).

The ABC News poll (1984) went farther than other surveys in probing liberal leanings by asking in 1981 and 1984 if "some network television news reporters seem to be pro-Communist in their views." More than one-third said yes in both surveys. The ABC News poll also asked which party people thought that television news reports tended to favor. Only small percentages thought that TV reports favored either the Democrats (17%) or Republicans (11%). These two sets of results are a remarkable contrast.

In one small study, liberals gave TV news higher credibility ratings when they perceived the political position of TV news to be liberal (Zanna and Del Vecchio, 1973). Similarly, conservatives perceiving TV news to be conservative gave higher credibility ratings. In the 1985 ASNE survey, people giving newspapers low credibility scores were about twice as likely as those giving high scores to perceive newspapers as either more conservative or more liberal than they. Those giving TV low scores were likely to see TV news as more liberal than they.

ASNE respondents were quite likely to perceive political bias when newspapers endorse political candidates. About half disagreed that a newspaper can endorse a candidate and still be fair to all candidates in reporting. Only one-third agreed that newspapers could endorse and still be fair (19% were neutral). People interviewed expressed strong disapproval of unequal coverage of political candidates. Overwhelming majorities believed that newspapers and TV news should give equal space and time to two candidates running for political office, regardless of the relative newsworthiness of those candidates. These findings were very much like those of the Public Agenda Foundation (Immerwahr and Doble, 1982).

The Media's Point of View

Large percentages of people interviewed for the 1985 ASNE study indicated that they believe coverage in the media is slanted both in content and selection. Half agreed that the media provide more coverage to stories that support their own point of view than to those that do not. Only one-fourth disagreed with this, and one-fourth were neutral. Other research has shown large majorities who perceive political bias or bias in general (Alter, et al, 1984; Yankelovich, et al, 1979). (See Table 7.)

How questions are worded makes a difference in findings about bias. For example, when asked to choose between two words, "biased" and "unbiased," 23% of the ASNE sample said their daily papers are biased (rating 1 or 2 on a 5-point scale) and 19% said television news is biased. More than one-third said that their daily papers and TV news are unbiased.

They were more likely to say that reporters' biases color the news. Despite the 63% agreement that news reporters usually try to be as objective as possible, respondents seemed to think that bias creeps into news reports anyway. About 54% agreed that "the personal biases of reporters often show

in their news reports," as opposed to 46% who agreed that "reporters are trained to keep their personal biases out of their news reports." These findings compare with those of Izard (1984), Whitney (1984), and Sussman (1981), as shown in Table 7.

Several other questions in the 1985 ASNE survey pointed to a widespread belief that opinions pervade newspapers. First, when asked to choose between two statements, 6 in 10 respondents agreed that "most news media are careful to separate fact from opinion," but 4 in 10 believed that "most news media don't do a very good job of letting people know what is fact and what is opinion."

Second, nearly 4 in 10 respondents said that their daily papers and TV news "separate facts from opinions, but one-fourth felt they "mix together fact and opinions." Third, when given a stark, one-word dichotomy, half called newspapers and TV news "factual," but one-sixth called them "opinionated." Fourth, in one series of questions, people were asked about whether five parts of their daily newspapers contained more opinion, about the same amount, or less opinion than the rest of the paper. A large number (43%) said that the editorial page contains about the <u>same</u> amount of opinion as the rest of the paper. Identical percentages (one-fourth) said "the front page" and "paid advertisements" contain more opinion than the rest of the paper (data not shown).

<u>Misunderstandings About Media Practices</u>

One potential reason for such a widespread perception of media bias is that people are confused by media policies about separating fact from opinion. Several questions in the 1985 ASNE survey highlighted this possibility. For example, people were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with two statements:

1. "When a reporter's 'by-line' is put on a story, the reporter is entitled to put his or her opinions in the story."

2. "People who write columns in newspapers are entitled to include their opinions in their columns."

Slightly more than 6 in 10 accepted the idea that newspaper columnists are entitled to include their opinions, but one-fourth would not allow columnists to be opinionated (13% felt neutral). Almost 4 in 10 thought that when a reporter's by-line appears on a story, the reporter is entitled to put his or her opinions in the story. Another 4 in 10 disagreed with this, and 2 in 10 took a neutral position.

Contending with Media Bias

People may not know much about media policies regarding fact and opinion, but they know what they want. Nearly 9 in 10 agreed that "news reports should stick to the facts rather than containing a lot of interpretation." One of the consequences of a belief that the media are biased is that a substantial minority (about 4 in 10) believed that media bias clouds facts so much that people cannot find out what the facts are. Table 7 shows results from two questions on this issue.

ISSUE 7: NEWS PRESENTATION ISSUES

How the news is presented also appears to contribute to a feeling that audiences and the media sometimes are on different wavelengths. Complaints by large majorities about too much bad news, overdramatization, and sensationalism are frequent both in the ASNE survey and in the research literature, as Table 8 demonstrates (Immerwahr, et al, 1980b; Clark, et al, 1984; Yankelovich, et al, 1979; Whitney, 1984; 1983 ABC Poll, cited by Gergen, 1984; Gallup, 1977).

About two-thirds of people interviewed in the 1985 ASNE survey disagreed with the statement that the news media try not to emphasize bad news too much. Just 22% agreed, and 13% took a neutral view. This finding

occurred despite the question's being written to emphasize the positive, since most questions about bad news accentuate the negative and might influence respondents' tendencies to complain about bad news.

Nearly two-thirds told ASNE survey interviewers that the news media put too much emphasis on what is wrong with America and not enough on what is right, a strongly critical position. Only 21% disagreed, and 16% took a middle position. About three-fourths agreed, either definitely or partly, with a similar statement in 1974 (Gallup).

Sensationalizing the News

Two-thirds of 1985 ASNE survey repondents said that reporters frequently overdramatize the news. The media, especially newspapers, did a little better on questions related to sensationalism. Three in 10 said their daily newspapers do sensationalize, but an equivalent proportion of people said they do not. About 4 in 10 said TV news sensationalizes, compared with 2 in 10 who said it does not.

Between 4 in 10 and almost 6 in 10 said in a 1984 poll that "sensational" describes their local newspapers, nationally influential newspapers, and local and national TV news (Alter, et al, 1984). They were a little more likely to criticize national media than local media. About 5 people in 10 said in another recent survey that newspapers sensationalize news to make it interesting, and 8 in 10 said that this was true of television (Clark, et al, 1984). Comparable percentages responded similarly in earlier research (Immerwahr, et al, 1980b). Table 8 summarizes much of this research.

ISSUE 8: INVASION OF PRIVACY AND TREATMENT OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

The belief that the press has little respect for the ordinary person was a strong and consistent finding in the 1985 ASNE study. Other research has suggested this, but the ASNE study especially highlighted this concern.

One vivid illustration was the 78% who said that most news reporters are just concerned about getting a good story, and they don't worry much about hurting people. Another striking example of distance was a high level of agreement (63%), either strongly or somewhat, that the press often takes advantage of victims of circumstance who are ordinary people. Only 21% disagreed with this, and only 16% felt neutral (Table 9).

The ASNE survey underscored an overriding sentiment that the media exploit people by invading the privacy of ordinary people. Respondents were somewhat more critical of television (40%) than newspapers (32%) on this topic. In other research, between 6 and 7 in 10 have agreed that "the major news media frequently violate the privacy of individual citizens" (Izard, 1984; Sussman, 1981); and more than 8 in 10 disagreed that "it's okay for TV news to invade the privacy of ordinary people while gathering a news story" (ABC News poll, 1984).

About one-fourth of people responding to the ASNE survey said that newspapers do not care about what the reader thinks, and about this many said that television news does not care about what its audience thinks. Levels of agreement that "reporters and editors in the major news media" do not care much about what the average person thinks have typically been even higher (Whitney, 1984; Sussman). Comparisons are shown in Table 9.

Both newspapers and television were criticized for not being favorable enough in coverage of the average person in the ASNE survey. About 3 in 10 said this was true of either medium, and only 2% or fewer said that either medium is too favorable in its portrayal of the average citizen. All of these findings underline previous research suggesting that newspapers are out of touch with the concerns of ordinary people, and this loss of the common touch is a cause of low newspaper credibility (Meyer, 1973). One reviewer of the Public Agenda Foundation study also hypothesized that hostility

toward the media has displaced or obscured hostility toward "fringe groups" because members of the public see themselves as underrepresented outsiders, or members of a fringe group, in relation to mass media (Kalven, 1982).

ISSUE 9: COVERAGE OF SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

In addition to the average person, other groups which do not receive favorable enough treatment by television and newspapers, in the opinion of ASNE respondents, are housewives, young people, senior citizens, and women who work outside the home. Perceptions that media consistently neglect these groups have also emerged in other research (Clark, et al, 1984; ABC News poll, 1984; Meyer, 1973).[3]

Groups mentioned most often for "too favorable" coverage or "too much attention" by media are business people and wealthy people (MORI Research, 1985b,c; Meyer, 1973). The contention that newspapers are "too friendly" to "people of wealth" is a long-standing criticism, as measured by Roper for Fortune in 1939 (Erskine, 1970-71). See Table 10 for a summary.

Membership in demographic groups influences perceptions of media treatment (MORI Research, 1985b,c; Clark, et al, 1984). For example, Democrats were most likely to say that media treatment of Democrats is not favorable enough, and Republicans tended to say that coverage of Democrats is too favorable, according to the 1985 ASNE survey.

ISSUE 10: PEOPLE IN THE MEDIA

When asked how much confidence they have in the people running ten different U.S. institutions, ASNE survey respondents ranked newspapers in general sixth, the press seventh, and television ninth. Only organized labor ranked below all three. ("Newspapers in general" had not been asked before.) These results were congruent with previous research. However, other results were different because they pointed to a variation in

perceptions of newspaper personnel, as compared with perceptions of television personnel.

The press typically ranks below the mean in surveys measuring confidence in people running institutions by Harris and NORC; however, confidence in the press has been increasing over time, according to analysis by Lipset and Schneider (1983). They found that confidence in "television" tends to be lower than in "the press," but that esteem for "television news" tends to be higher. In general, poll data since the mid-1960's indicate (1) an overall decline of public confidence in major social institutions and (2) the press has suffered less decline in public credence in comparison with most other institutions over time (McCombs and Washington, 1983). When "the media" are pitted against business, government, and labor in poll questions, the media tend to draw highest ratings among these four institutions (Gergen, 1984; Lipset and Schneider; Lewis, 1981).

Results in the ASNE study were similar when respondents were asked to rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in ten different occupations. Newspaper editors and newspaper reporters ranked seventh and eighth, behind members of the clergy, doctors, police, TV news anchors, public school teachers, and TV reporters. Only advertising executives and used-car salesmen ranked lower than newspaper reporters and editors. Typically, "news reporters" or "journalists" have ranked in about the middle of such lists (Izard, 1984; Lipset and Schneider). The ASNE survey is apparently the first to distinguish between newspaper reporters and television reporters, rather than lump them together. It also is apparently the first to ask specifically about television anchormen and women and newspaper editors. The TV news anchors were held in highest esteem among the media people, ranking fourth among the ten groups.

ISSUE 11: THE MEDIA AS AN INSTITUTION

Majorities of ASNE respondents saw the media as institutions serving society, but significant minorities did not. This finding meshes with some previous research, although results were a little different for a question asked by the Public Agenda Foundation. Question wording may partly account for this.

In the ASNE survey, 64% agreed that the news media are pretty independent despite the efforts of special interest groups to manipulate them, but 36% agreed that the news media often are manipulated by powerful people. Six in 10 agreed that news coverage generally is not influenced by advertisers, as opposed to 4 in 10 who agreed that advertisers often receive favored treatment. Other research shows large numbers, sometimes more than half, who believe that newspaper coverage is often influenced by advertisers (Clark, et al, 1984; Gallup, 1938, cited by Erskine, 1970-71).

People also were asked in the ASNE research whether they thought their daily newspapers and television news are concerned mainly about the public interest or about making profits. About 4 in 10 said both are concerned mainly about the public interest, about 2 in 10 said they are concerned mainly about making profits, and 4 in 10 took a neutral view, according to 1985 ASNE survey results. In comparison, 64% told Public Agenda Foundation interviewers that most people who work for newspapers and television news really care about serving the public interest, and 21% took an opposite view (15% did not know) (Immerwahr, et al, 1980b).

ISSUE 12: PEOPLE WHO DISTRUST MEDIA THE MOST

Four demographic groups of people stood out in the ASNE survey as being especially critical of newspapers. Two of these groups have been pointed out by previous research, and two have received less research attention.

One is a segment of the population which tends to have high income and education, to be more knowledgeable than others about news coverage, and to take action when provoked by media content. They were defined by a combination of demographic and attitude items and termed the "sophisticated skeptics." They are very interested in news and newspapers but also highly critical of newspapers and television. They tend to be disproportionately Republican and conservative. Other research has suggested the presence of this group among those most critical of the media, including Whitney's "elite public," a group identified as having high interest in controversial news (Anast, 1961), Mulder's "active news seekers" (1980), and the "low credibility, high use" group isolated by Westley and Severin (1964).

Another is a segment of the population which tends to have low education and income, to be relatively less knowledgeable, and to be less prone to take action than others. This group, also defined by a combination of demographic and attitude items and termed the "less well informed and suspicious," was especially likely to be confused by newspaper policies on separation of fact and opinion and to have serious problems with media credibility. This group is reminiscent of Whitney's "critical, nonsupportive public" and Mulder's "passive news seekers."

Third, young people, aged 18 to 24, were less likely than others to support many press rights and privileges, which suggests that the press may face even more serious obstacles in the future unless a stronger franchise among this group is established. Young people also had a higher orientation to broadcast media than to print media.

Fourth, blacks showed lower confidence in newspapers than in other media, although areas of their support for newspapers and the news media also were pointed out.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Twelve aspects of the media credibility problem have been described in order to show how findings of the 1985 ASNE credibility study add new insights, illuminate and corroborate previous research, and point out contradictions.

Several suggestions for future research grow out of this discussion. One area to probe further might be the "sophisticated skeptics," and how their numbers might be reduced. Because of rising education levels, increasing audience sophistication, and the likelihood that this group is influential beyond its numbers, this group seems very important to study. The other three groups who are especially likely to distrust the media might also be studied in order to address their concerns about the media. The graying of the audience most loyal to newspapers emphasizes the problem newspapers face of attracting younger readers. The gulf between media and minority groups remains to be closed. Newspapers successfully faced the challenge of attracting large numbers of immigrants, the minorities of their time, by a number of innovations during the era of "the penny press." Newspapers appear to be at a crossroads not unlike the one of that earlier day. New, actionable research could aid newspapers in developing more innovations, promoting present strengths, and targeting new audiences.

Another possibility for future research is to examine journalists and the role they play in credibility problem development and solution. MORI Research is in the process of planning and carrying out a study of newspaper journalists and credibility, sponsored by the Associated Press Managing Editors. Like the ASNE data, the APME data will be publicly available through the Roper Center in late 1985 or early 1986.

New research could examine profitably the ways in which the media contribute to the average citizen's distrust, especially with respect to perceptions of media treatment of ordinary people, invasion of privacy, and overdramatization of the news. It could also examine more fully the lack of

understanding many people have of media policies about separating facts and opinions, using bylines, endorsing candidates, and using such labels as "analysis" and "commentary." This research could help the media educate the public about their policies and practices.

More information is needed on the potentially eroding local news "franchise" of newspapers, how people evaluate media coverage of controversy (also covered by the ASNE study but not detailed here), and other ways in which media credibility problems may be topic-specific. More work remains to be done on separation of "media credibility" from credibility of news sources themselves (e.g., see Edelstein and Tefft, 1974). Not enough is known about how credibility relates to media use and behavior (see MORI Research, 1985b,c for some data on this).

More investigation is needed about perceived differences between print and broadcast. Perhaps people believe television often because visual images introduce more communication elements such as proxemics (use of space), kinesics (movement), and paralinguistics (intonation and other nonverbal speech elements).

The 1985 ASNE study showed that a considerable majority of the population has low confidence in media in a number of areas and that the size of the group holding media in low esteem varies with the credibility issue. More needs to be known about how to analyze the concerns of highly critical audiences and successfully reduce the size of the credibility problem. Much work remains to be done to separate out credibility concerns relevant to individual media and those which media share.

FOOTNOTES

1. MORI Research has compiled an annotated bibliography of media credibility research, which is included in the technical report of the ASNE survey (1985c).

2. At least 14 published studies besides Roper (1983) have used the Roper question, including: Abel and Wirth, 1977; Baxter and Bittner, 1974; Carter and Greenberg, 1965; Chang and Lemert, 1968; Gantz, 1981; Greenberg, 1966; Jacobson, 1969; Lee, 1978; Lemert, 1970; Mulder, 1980; Reagan and Zenaty, 1979; Lewis, 1981 (also see: Shaw, 1981); Shaw, 1973; and Stempel, 1973.

3. An exception is Meyer's 1973 research showing that 33% in a Detroit survey thought that "women's lib" was treated too favorably by newspapers. Part of the reason for a dramatic change in attitudes toward media coverage of women is that times have changed. Another reason for the difference could be question wording. "Women's lib" tends to have an unfavorable connotation.

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The project was conducted by MORI Research, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Kristin McGrath, president of MORI Research, headed the research and coordinated planning with the ASNE Credibility Committee, of which David Lawrence, Jr., was chairman. Cecilie Gaziano, research analyst, was project director of the national survey. Virginia Dodge Fielder, director of news and circulation research for Knight-Ridder Newspapers, contributed ideas for report organization and writing.

Sharon Polansky, doctoral student at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, helped develop codes for open-ended questions and did coding. Paula Hartman, of MORI Research, also developed codes for open-ended questions and did coding. Other coders were Karen McKeon and James Jeffery at MORI Research. Brent Stahl, research analyst, Lee Kaplan, account executive, and Arline Satrom, research assistant, all MORI staffers, made conceptual and technical contributions to project planning and report preparation.

Jeanne Drew Surveys, Inc., conducted the interviewing, and C. J. Olson Marketing Research also conducted some interviewing.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Copies of a published summary of the focus group and national survey research, Newspaper Credibility: Building Reader Trust, are available at $6.50 from the American Society of Newspaper Editors, P.O. Box 17004, Washington, D.C. 20041 (phone 703-620-6087). There is a 20 percent discount for orders of 20 or more copies. Make checks payable to ASNE. A detailed technical report and a focus group report also are available from ASNE.

The data tapes for the survey have been deposited with the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut. Inquiries may be addressed to the Center at Box U164, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CN 06268. Telephone (203) 486-4441.

APPENDIX: HOW THE 1985 ASNE CREDIBILITY STUDY WAS CONDUCTED

The media credibility issue was explored by MORI Research in a two-phase study sponsored by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. The first phase was a series of focus group discussions; the second was a national, representative sampling of adults aged 18 and older living in the contiguous United States.

The Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase of the project had two parts. First, a national, representative and projectable sample of adults was interviewed by telephone. Then, during the second part, respondents were asked to complete a questionnaire mailed to them at home.

The initial telephone sample was selected through random-digit dialing, a technique that allows unlisted numbers to be included. Up to four attempts were made to reach respondents determined to be eligible for the survey. All interviewing was conducted from central, monitored facilities.

Interviews, lasting 20 minutes on the average, were completed with 1,600 adults between December 7, 1984, and January 19, 1985. The statistical margin of error for a random sample of this size is plus or minus 3 percentage points. Error margins are larger for sub-groups.

During the initial telephone interviews, respondents were asked to give their names and addresses so a second questionnaire could be sent to them through the mail. Those who agreed received a 12-page questionnaire, a cover letter, and a $1 incentive. After about a week, these people were re-contacted by telephone so they could read back numbers corresponding to their answers on the mail questionnaire. Final telephone interviews were completed with 1,002 respondents during this second phase (December 14 to January 30). The completion rate was 58% of contacts with eligible respondents, and those taking part in the second phase were 63% of those completing the first part. The coefficient of inter-coder agreement for coding the open-ended questions is .94.

For the analysis, results were weighted by sex, education, household size, and race to match national figures from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Results described in this paper and the report are based on the weighted data, totalling 1,469 persons. Results for the second part are based on responses from the mail sub-sample, whose weighted total is 869 persons.

The mail sub-sample somewhat underrepresents people aged 18 to 24 and 65 or older, people with lower education and income, blacks, men, and widowed people. It slightly overrepresents people aged 25 to 44, those with higher education and income, women, married people, and those who read a newspaper yesterday. Based on a comparison of answers to the initial phone interview, there were essentially no differences between those who completed the mail questionnaire and those who did not as far as other media use characteristics, demographics, or attitudes toward news and the media were concerned.

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TABLE 1: CONFLICTING MEDIA REPORTS

Roper, 1983:6.

If you got conflicting or different reports of the same news story from radio, television, the magazines and the newspapers, which of the four versions would you be most inclined to believe--the one on radio or television or magazines or newspapers?

Most Believable	1959	1961	1971	1982	(MORI Research) 1985
Newspapers	32%	24%	20%	22%	22%
Television	29	39	49	53	45
Radio	12	12	10	6	8
Magazines	10	10	9	8	12
Don't know/no answer	17	17	12	11	8
None/other answers					6

Roper for Fortune, August 1939 (Erskine, 1970-71:641)

If you heard conflicting versions of the same story from these sources, which would you be most likely to believe?

Radio press bulletin	23%
Radio commentator	18
Authority you heard speak	13
Editorial in newspaper	12
News item in newspaper	11
Columnist in newspaper	3
Depends	12
Don't know	8

RADIO AND NEWSPAPERS COMPARED (Erskine, 1970-71:634, 642)

NORC, March 1945	Radio	Newspapers	Neither/ No Opinion	
As a whole, which do you think gives you the most accurate news--radio or the newspapers?	46%	29%	25%	
Roper for Fortune, August 1939:				
Which of the two--radio or newspaper--gets news to you more accurately?	38%	38%	24%	
Which of the two--radio or newspaper--gets news to you freer from prejudice?	50%	17%	15%	Both Same 18%

TABLE 2: PREFERRED NEWS SOURCES

Roper, 1983:5.

First, I'd like to ask you where you usually get most of your news about what's going on in the world today--from the newspapers or radio or television or magazines or talking to people or where? (Multiple answers accepted.)

Source of most news	1959	1961	1971	1982
Television	51%	52%	60%	65%
Newspapers	57	57	48	44
Radio	34	34	23	18
Magazines	8	9	5	6
People	4	5	4	4
All mentions	154	157	140	137

Same data repercentaged on basis of total mentions, with figures for all media in each year adding to 100% to determine each medium's audience share:

Source of most news	1959	1961	1971	1982
Television	33%	33%	43%	48%
Newspapers	37	36	34	32
All others	30	31	23	20

Los Angeles Times Poll (Lewis, 1981, questions 9, 65, 66)

Where people get most of their information about:

	What people are doing today, what's going on in world (multiple responses allowed)	What's happening around here (only one response)	What's happening in the world (only one response)
Newspapers	68%	42%	28%
Radio	28	13	7
TV	73	30	55
Magazine	16	1	5
People	15	13	4
Other	1	0	0
Not sure	0	1	1
Refused	0	0	0

(Table continued on next page)

Table 2, continued: Preferred News Sources

MORI Research, 1985b:42

If you had to choose <u>one</u> source for local (state, national and international news), which source would you choose--newspapers, television, radio, or magazines?

	Local	State	National/International
Television	50%	57%	72%
Newspapers	36	33	18
Radio	12	8	5
Magazines	2	2	5

Clark, et al, 1984:46

Suppose you had to depend on just <u>one</u> source for (list below): which one would it be--a daily newspaper, a weekly newspaper, television, radio, news magazine or a Sunday newspaper?

	Daily Newspaper	Weekly Newspaper	Television	Radio	News Magazine	Sunday Newspaper
Community/neighborhood news	66%	10%	11%	7%	1%	5%
State news	50	14	22	5	1	8
National news	48	8	33	3	3	5
Sports	48	12	24	4	3	7
Advertising	53	18	12	3	1	11

Newsweek Poll, conducted by Gallup (Alter, et al, 1984:68)

Where do you get most of your news about current events? (Multiple answers accepted).

Television	62%
Newspapers	56
Radio	13
Magazines	9
Talking to other people	1

TABLE 3: RELIABILITY OF NEWS SOURCE

MORI Research, 1985b:43

Overall, does local and state (national and international) news seem more reliable to you when you see it on television, read it in a newspaper, hear it over the radio, or read it in a magazine?

	Local and State	National and International
Television	58%	68%
Newspapers	31	19
Radio	7	4
Magazines	4	9

L.A. Times Poll (Lewis, 1981, question 113)

Does the news seem more reliable to you when you see it on TV, or when you read it in a newspaper?

On TV	61%
Newspaper	26
Same	12
Not sure	1
Refused	0

MORI Research, 1985b:38

Overall, how would you rate the reliability of the daily newspaper you are the most familiar with (television news)? Please use a scale of "1" to "5," where "1" means "not at all reliable" and "5" means "very reliable." (Based on subsample who completed Part 2 questionnaire)

	Daily Newspapers	Television News
Positive (rated as 4 or 5 on the 5-point scale)	63%	65%
Neutral (rated as 3)	30	29
Negative (rated as 1 or 2)	7	6

TABLE 4: UNDERSTANDING THE NEWS

A. TRUSTING MEDIA TO HELP UNDERSTAND NEWS

MORI Research, 1985b:41

If there is a situation in your local area that is hard to understand or is controversial, which one of your local news media would you trust the most to help you understand it? (Question repeated also for national news)

Washington Post poll (Sussman, 1981:A2)

If there is a situation in the news that is hard to understand or controversial, which part of the major news media would you trust the most to help you understand it?

	MORI Research Local News	MORI Research National News	Washington Post News in Major Media
Television	34%	54%	46%
Newspapers	46	27	17
Radio	10	4	5
Magazines	2	8	25
No opinion/none of them	8	6	7

B. WHETHER OR NOT THE NEWS IS TOO COMPLICATED TO UNDERSTAND

L.A. Times Poll (Lewis, 1981, question 133)

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Sometimes the news seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on.

MORI Research, 1985c

I'd like to keep up better with what's happening in the world, but it's just too complicated and confusing. (Agree-disagree, measured on a 5-point scale)

	MORI Research	L.A. Times Poll
Agree/the news is too complicated	41%	56%
Feel neutral (scoring 3 on 5-point scale)	15	N.A.
Disagree/it's not too hard to understand news	44	43
Not sure, refused	0	1

MORI RESEARCH

TABLE 5: ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS

MORI Research, 1985b:20, 29

Here are some pairs of words and phrases with opposite meanings. Please circle the number in between each pair that best represents how you feel about the daily newspaper you have in mind. (Repeated for television news; based on subsample completing Part 2 interview.)

	Daily Newspapers	TV News
Accurate (scoring 1 or 2 on 5-point scale)	49%	50%
Neutral (scoring 3)	36	37
Inaccurate (scoring 4 or 5)	15	13
Fair	52	52
Neutral	38	37
Unfair	10	11

Public Agenda Foundation (Immerwahr, et al, 1980b:Part II, Table 11)
Clark, et al, 1984:27 (Some wording differs slightly)

	Immerwahr, et al			Clark, et al		
	Agree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Television news stories are usually accurate. They almost always get their facts straight.	50%	37%	13%	43%	48%	9%
Newspaper stories are usually accurate. They almost always get their facts straight.	35	52	14	41	48	11
Television news stories are usually fair. They bend over backwards to tell both sides of a story.	41	46	14	29	63	8
Newspaper stories are usually fair. They bend over backwards to tell both sides of a story.	31	54	15	38	50	12

L.A. Times (Lewis, 1981, questions 108-109)

Now, I'm going to read you some words that people have used to describe the media, and I'd like you to tell me which one or two of them are the best descriptions of the newspapers (television). If you feel that none of the words is a good description, or that all of them are, just say so. . . (Up to 2 replies accepted for list of 7 words, plus "all" or "none")

	Newspapers	Television
Fair	35%	31%
Accurate	14%	13%

(Table is continued on next page)

Table 5, continued (Accuracy and Fairness)

Newsweek Poll, conducted by Gallup (Alter, et al, 1984:68)

For each of the major elements of today's news media, tell me whether these descriptions are generally applicable. (Based on those expressing an opinion)

	The paper you read	Nationally influential newspapers	Local TV news	Network TV news
Accurate	73%	78%	81%	81%
Fair	79%	77%	82%	76%

Public Agenda Foundation (Immerwahr, et al, 1980b:Part III, Table 22)

Just to recap, I'll read you a few of the problems we've just talked about. For each one, tell me whether you think it's a very serious problem, a fairly serious problem, or no real problem. If you're not sure, just say so. . . Not enough fairness in the news:

A very serious problem	28%
A fairly serious problem	31
No real problem	32
Not sure	10

ABC News Poll (1984, question 3)

Do you think there ought to be a law requiring the network news divisions to be accurate and fair, or do you think there is no need for such a law?

Yes, ought to be a law	58%
No, no need for law	37
No opinion	6

Gallup Poll, 1974:45

Will you tell me whether you definitely agree, partly agree, partly disagree, or definitely disagree with this criticism (of newspapers in general)? Newspapers are not careful about getting their facts straight.

Definitely agree	26%
Partly agree	41
Partly disagree	21
Definitely disagree	9
No answer	3

Izard, 1984:12	Agree	Disagree
Information provided by the news media is, on the whole, accurate. (Strongly and somewhat combined)	67%	33%

TABLE 6: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH NEWS TOPICS

MORI Research, 1985b:19

Has the daily newspaper you are the most familiar with ever contained news coverage about events or issues that you had personal knowledge of? (Repeated for television news; responses based on Part 2 subsample)

	Daily Newspaper	Television News
Yes	73%	54%
No	27	46

(If yes:) How fair and accurate was the coverage about which you had personal knowledge? Please use a scale of "1" to "5."

	Daily Newspaper	Television News
Fair (scoring 4 or 5 on scale)	63%	57%
Neutral rating (scoring 3)	23	30
Not very fair (scoring 1 or 2)	14	13
Accurate (scoring 4 or 5)	59%	55%
Neutral rating (scoring 3)	27	30
Not very accurate (scoring 1 or 2)	14	15

Washington Post Poll, (Sussman, 1981:A2). Whitney, 1984:24. Izard, 1984:13.

What has been your experience: in the things you have known a good deal about personally, how often have news stories in the major news media been accurate?

	Post	Whitney "the media"	Izard
Almost always	14%	9%	11%
Most of the time	56	50	52
Some of the time	22	36	27
Not very often/hardly ever	6	5	8
No opinion	2	N.A.	N.A.

Newsweek Poll, conducted by Gallup (Alter, et al, 1984:68)

What has been your experience: in things you have been involved with or know about personally, have the media got the facts straight, or have they been inaccurate?

L.A. Times (Lewis, 1981, questions 96-97)

When the media reports on something you personally know about, do you find that the story is usually accurate, or usually inaccurate? (Repeated for "fair")

	Newsweek	L.A. Times	L.A. Times	
Accurate	46%	61%	Fair	71%
Inaccurate	37	32	Unfair	20
Not sure/refused	17	7	Unsure	9

TABLE 7: OPINION AND BIAS

MORI Research, 1985b:27, 30-31, 33-34, 56 (Based on Part 2 subsample)

Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: (strongly agree and somewhat disagree combined, measured on 5-point scale)

	Agree (1 or 2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4 or 5)
The news media give more coverage to stories that support their own point of view than to those that don't.	51%	25%	24%
If a newspaper endorses a candidate in an editorial, the news coverage will still be fair to all candidates.	34	19	47
When a reporter's byline is put on a story, the reporter is entitled to put his or her opinions in the story.	38	21	41
People who write columns in newspapers are entitled to include their opinions in their columns.	62	13	25
News reports should stick to the facts rather than containing a lot of interpretation.	87	10	3
News reporters usually try to be as objective as they possibly can be.	63	17	20
It's up to individuals to sort out all the biases in the news media and to find out the truth for themselves.	50	10	40

Here are some pairs of words and phrases with opposite meanings. Please circle the number in between each pair that best represents how you feel about the daily newspaper you have in mind (television news). (5-point scale)

	Daily Newspaper	TV News
Factual (scoring 1 or 2 on 5-point scale)	50%	48%
Neutral (scoring 3)	33	35
Opinionated (scoring 4 or 5)	17	17
Separates facts from opinions	38	38
Neutral	37	37
Mixes together facts and opinions	25	25
Unbiased	36	39
Neutral	41	42
Biased	23	19

(Table continued on next page)

Table 7, continued: Opinion and Bias

Which of the following statements comes the closest to how you personally feel?

	Agree
o Most news media are careful to separate fact from opinion.	58%
OR	
Most news media don't do a very good job of letting people know what is fact and what is opinion.	42%
o If two candidates are running for a public office from major political parties, newspapers should give an equal amount of space to both candidates.	88%
OR	
Newspapers should feel free to give more space to one candidate than another if they feel one candidate is more newsworthy.	12%
o If two candidates are running for public office from major political parties, television news programs should give an equal amount of time to both candidates.	91%
OR	
Television news programs should feel free to give more time to one candidate than another if they feel one candidate is more newsworthy.	9%
o Reporters are trained to keep their personal biases out of their news reports.	46%
OR	
The personal biases of reporters often show in their news reports.	54%
o Although there is some bias in the news media, the average person has enough sources of news to be able to sort out the facts.	64%
OR	
There's so much bias in the news media that it's often difficult to sort out the facts.	36%

Newsweek Poll, conducted by Gallup (Alter, et al, 1984:68)

For each of the major elements of today's news media, tell me whether these descriptions are generally applicable. (Based on those expressing an opinion.)

	The paper you read	Nationally influential newspapers	Local TV News	Network TV News
Politically biased	62%	71%	54%	61%

(Table continued on next page)

Table 7, continued: Opinion and Bias

Washington Post Poll, (Sussman, 1981:A2). Whitney, 1984:24. Izard, 1984:9.

Do you agree or disagree:
Reporters in the major news media often give too much of their own opinions and not enough facts.

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
Washington Post	59%	30%	11%
Whitney ("the news media")	61%	40%	N.A.
Izard	58%	42%	N.A.

Public Agenda Foundation (Immerwahr and Doble, 1982:179)

Agree or disagree:	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
Major party candidates have a right to get as much coverage in newspapers as their opponents get.	91%	6%	4%
Television news has the right to give candidates of one of the major political parties more coverage than it gives to candidates of the other party.	13	79	7

Yankelovich, Skelly and White, 1979:13.

Television and newspapers bias the news and distort events.

	Total Public	Republicans	Conservatives
Definitely true	30%	39%	37%
Probably true	42	34	38
Probably not true	20	19	16
Definitely not true	4	3	2
Don't know/no answer	4	5	6

Gallup, 1974:46.

Here are some criticisms that have been made about newspapers in general. Will you tell me whether you definitely agree, partly agree, partly disagree, or definitely disagree? Newspapers stress the news that favors the liberal side. (Repeated for conservative side.)

	Favors Liberal	Favors Conservative
Definitely agree	12%	5%
Partly agree	34	29
Partly disagree	33	41
Definitely disagree	12	15
No answer	8	10

TABLE 8: NEWS PRESENTATION ISSUES

MORI Research, 1985b:24.

Please mark how much you agree or disagree (strongly or somewhat) with the following statements:

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Reporters frequently overdramatize the news.	68%	15%	17%
The news media try <u>not</u> to emphasize bad news too much.	22%	13%	65%
The news media put too much emphasis on what is wrong with America and not enough on what is right.	63%	16%	21%
(Gallup, 1974:44, same question as above:)	76%	N.A.	22%

Here are some pairs of words and phrases with opposite meanings. Please circle the number in between each pair that <u>best</u> represents how you feel about the daily newspaper you have in mind (television news).

	Daily Newspaper	Television News
Sensationalizes (1 or 2 on 5-point scale)	29%	41%
Neutral (scoring 3)	41	39
Does not sensationalize (scoring 4 or 5)	30	20

Public Agenda Foundation (Immerwahr, et al, 1980b:Part II, Table 22).

Agree or disagree:	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
Newspapers pay too much attention to bad news. They don't tell us enough about the good things that are happening.	71%	23%	7%
Television pays too much attention to bad news. They don't tell us enough about the good things that are happening.	64%	29%	8%
Too often, newspapers will sensationalize the news. They'll do just about anything to make a story interesting.	62%	26%	12%
Too often, television will sensationalize the news. They'll do just about anything to make a story interesting.	66%	21%	13%

(Table is continued on next page)

MORI RESEARCH

Table 8 continued: News Presentation Issues

Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, 1979:13.

Which, if any, of these do you think are valid criticisms of news you get from television and newspapers?

	Agree
--Too much emphasis on bad news and not good news	71%

ABC News/Washington Post Poll, 1983 (Source: Gergen, 1984:7)

Do you think TV news concentrates too much on bad news and not enough on good news?

Yes	73%
No	22

Newsweek Poll, conducted by Gallup (Alter, et al, 1984:68)

For each of the major elements of today's news media, tell me whether these descriptions are generally applicable. (Based on those expressing an opinion.)

	The paper you read	Nationally influential newspapers	Local TV News	Network TV News
Too negative	34%	42%	31%	38%
Sensational	41%	52%	48%	57%

Whitney, 1984:24.

	SA	A	D	SD
The news media spend too much time reporting on negative news and not enough time on good news.	28%	36%	28%	8%

Clark, et al, 1984:28-29.

	1984	1979
Newspapers pay too much attention to bad news and not enough about the good things. Agree:	66%	76%
Television pays too much attention to bad news and not enough to the good things. Agree:	64%	70%
Television sensationalizes news to make it interesting. Agree:		81%
Newspapers sensationalize news to make it interesting. Agree:		52%

MORI RESEARCH

TABLE 9: THE PRESS AND ORDINARY PEOPLE

MORI Research, 1985b:16-17. (Based on Part 2 subsample)

Which of the following statements comes the closest to how you personally feel?

	Agree
o Most news reporters are just concerned about getting a good story, and they don't worry very much about hurting people.	78%
OR	
Most news reporters worry about how their stories may hurt people.	22%
o The press looks out for ordinary people.	54%
OR	
The press looks out mainly for powerful people.	46%

Please mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statement (strongly or somewhat combined):	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The press often takes advantage of victims of circumstance who are ordinary people.	63%	16%	21%

Now, here are some different kinds of people. For each, please give your opinion of how they are covered by the daily newspaper you are the most familiar with (television news): THE AVERAGE PERSON	Daily Newspaper	Television News
Too favorable	1%	2%
Just about right	69	69
Not favorable enough	30	29

Here are some pairs of words and phrases with opposite meanings. Please circle the number in between each pair that best represents how you feel about the daily newspaper you have in mind. (Repeated for TV news.)	Daily Newspaper	Television News
Respects people's privacy (1 or 2 on 5-point scale)	30%	24%
Neutral (scoring 3)	38	36
Invades people's privacy (scoring 4 or 5)	32	40
Watches out after your interests	36	31
Neutral	43	46
Does not watch out after your interests	21	23
Cares what the reader (viewer) thinks	44	44
Neutral	31	32
Does not care what the reader (viewer) thinks	25	24

(Table is continued on next page)

MORI RESEARCH

(Table 9 continued: The Press and Ordinary People.)

Washington Post poll (Sussman, 1981). Whitney, 1984:24. Izard, 1984:9.

Do you agree or disagree: (strongly and somewhat combined)

I don't think that reporters and editors in the major news media care much about what people like me think.	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
Washington Post:	46%	44%	10%
Whitney: ("the news media")	39%	60%	N.A.

The major news media frequently violate the privacy of individual citizens.			
Washington Post:	63%	28%	9%
Izard:	70%	30%	N.A.

ABC News Poll, 1981 and 1984 (question 8f).

It's okay for TV news to invade the privacy of ordinary people while gathering a news story.

	1984	1981
Agree	14%	18%
Disagree	84	79
No opinion	1	3

TABLE 10: COVERAGE OF SPECIFIC DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

MORI Research, 1985b:36. (Subsample: Those who participated in Part 2 interview)

Now, here are some different kinds of people. For each, please give your opinion of how they are covered by the daily paper you are the most familiar with (television news). Is the coverage too favorable, just about right, or not favorable enough?

	Too Favorable	Just About Right	Not Favorable Enough
Hispanics			
Newspaper	9	78	13
TV News	9	78	13
Clark, et al, 1984:39*	5	69	20
Democrats			
Newspaper	12	78	10
TV News	12	81	7
Meyer, 1973:33**	8	81	11
Communists			
Newspaper	15	78	7
TV News	17	77	6
Meyer, 1973	22	72	7
Military leaders			
Newspaper	12	76	12
TV News	13	75	12
Meyer, 1973	19	67	14
Women who work outside the home			
Newspaper	7	75	18
TV News	7	75	18
Meyer, 1973 ("Women's lib")	33	59	8
Clark, et al, 1984 ("Working women")	3	73	21
Housewives			
Newspaper	2%	68	30
TV News	3	70	27
Clark, et al, 1984	3	70	23

* The categories of Clark, et al, are a little different. They are "too much attention," "too little attention," and "right amount." Also, Clark, et al, reported figures for response category "not sure."

** Meyer's question was: As you know, the editorial page reflects the stand the newspaper takes on issues of the day. This is separate from the regular reporting in the news columns. Now, I am going to read a list of some groups that are often mentioned in the news columns these days. For each one, please tell me whether newspapers treat them too favorably, about right, or not favorably enough.

(Table is continued on next page)

Table 10, continued: Specific Demographic Groups.

	Too Favorable	Just About Right	Not Favorable Enough
Republicans			
Newspaper	19	73	8
TV News	16	74	10
Meyer, 1973	20	76	5
Blacks			
Newspaper	14	70	16
TV News	17	68	15
Meyer, 1973	34	48	18
Clark, et al, 1984	5	74	16
Young people			
Newspaper	5	68	27
TV News	4	68	28
Meyer, 1973	12	54	34
Clark, et al, 1984	2	70	25
Business people			
Newspaper	25	68	7
TV News	21	71	8
Meyer, 1973 ("Businessmen")	23	70	7
Labor union members			
Newspaper	19	67	14
TV News	22	68	10
Meyer, 1973 ("Labor")	16	68	16
Police			
Newspaper	11	66	23
TV News	10	66	24
Meyer, 1973	7	49	44
Senior citizens			
Newspaper	6	63	31
TV News	5	64	31
Meyer, 1973	2	54	44
People on welfare			
Newspaper	19	61	20
TV News	22	59	19
Meyer, 1973	40	48	13

Roper for Fortune, August 1939 (Erskine, 1970-71:641)

In general, do you think the papers you read have been too friendly or too antagonistic toward:

	Too friendly	Too antag.	Neither	Don't know
People of wealth	27%	8%	47%	18%
Communists	19%	9%	38%	35%
Labor	9%	19%	48%	24%